

Pearl SC-40 Sync

Some of you may remember Pearl's initial entry into electronic percussion, which was called *Syncussion*. Next came the *Fightman*, and then the *Drum-X*. The fourth generation of Pearl electronics is named *Syncussion-X*—the most high-tech unit ever from Pearl.

Besides producing regular drumkit sounds, the *Syncussion-X* also generates cymbals, gongs, timpani, Latin percussion, chimes, xylophones, etc., using four digital tone generators—making it a complete programmable percussion synth. In total, there are 128 separate preset sounds available. The unit also has the capacity to hold a maximum of 32 different kit setups in memory.

Pearl's drumpads are available with plastic shells in either ivory or black. They are eight-sided, with a round rubber playing surface. That surface is double-layered, with a hard rubber top and a soft rubber bottom to attain a natural stick rebound. The pads measure approximately 12" x 12" x 3" and have an opening to accept Pearl's standard 7/8" tom-tom arm with memory lock. A T-screw on the bottom of the pad secures the pad on the holder arm. (By the way, all the Pearl pads have 1/4" input jacks.)



The bass drum pad measures 22" high x 25" wide x 5" deep. In the center is a 6" round rubber impact area. A large pedal mounting plate is at the bottom, and long straight tubes are used as spurs. These locate near the top of the pad, and are fixed in a severe forward angle, so creeping is minimized. All the drumpads have a good feel and are pretty well acoustically silent.

The *Syncussion-X* also has cymbal pads. These have square playing surfaces and make no attempt to visually simulate a real cymbal. (See photo.) I didn't have a problem with the location of the rubber pad when playing ride-cymbal sounds. However, when using one of the pads for crash

sounds, I kept wanting to hit near the edge of the pad, where there's just bare plastic! Perhaps Pearl could take note of this natural tendency that drummers are likely to have. The cymbal pads will mount onto regular straight or boom cymbal stand tilters. A harder playing surface is used, so stick rebound is quite similar to playing on a real cymbal.

Pearl's unique hi-hat pad is shaped the same as the other cymbal pads, but mounts directly onto your hi-hat stand. The pad fits over the stand's top rod and is held in place via a Pearl AX-20 adaptor. When the hi-hat clutch comes down on the pad, it activates a small switch, making opened/closed sounds available when using the stand's pedal in the normal fashion. There are two ways to get hi-hat sounds, depending on how you connect it up. You can either have opened/closed sticking sounds or opened/closed pedaling sounds. (I guess they'd be called "ring" and "chick.") The hi-hat pad concept is quite workable and, in fact, quite enjoyable.

Pearl also offers a special *Quad Pad* that has four round pad surfaces compactly arranged on one pad shell. Each surface can be assigned its own sound at the brain, so ideally, you could use only two *Quad Pads* and be able to generate eight sounds. This reminds me of Simmons' old "suitcase" unit. This *Quad Pad* setup could work conveniently for Latin and hand percussion players. The pad is an optional add-on and retails at \$300.00. All in all, the variety of *Syncussion-X* pads offers the potential for a *totally electronic setup*.



The *Syncussion-X* brain is rack-mountable, and has an array of push buttons and LEDs, which of course are all functional in getting sounds. Eight small rotary knobs are on the extreme left; these are used to control pad sensitivity. The right side of the panel has the master volume control, headphone jack, and power button. In the middle is where it's all happening: Eight

numbered push buttons are assigned to call up kits and individual preset timbres. Two other buttons are used to select which of the two groups and banks you want to get into, as well as functioning to set the programming values of the parameters. Four other buttons are used to move a cursor LED along rows of listed function settings for kit playing and programming, such as kit mode, program mode (test or normal), cassette dump, memory protection, MIDI status, preset call mode, pad copy mode, plus the individual programmable parameters. Other LEDs indicate trigger level and which pad is triggering. Plus, there are digital readout windows, which give kit number, pad number, preset number, and parameter value. No matter where you are on the panel with the cursor LED, a button called "Home" will get you back to kit-playing mode in one push.

Programmable parameters are: wave, pitch, modulation, noise, bend envelope, bend depth, bend speed, filter frequency, filter envelope, envelope depth, envelope speed, tone decay, attack filter frequency, attack filter width, attack decay, attack/tone balance, level, and stereo pan. All of these have different maximum setting values, which are adjusted with the two "Value" buttons to either increase or decrease the value number, thus altering the sound. For example, pitch has 63 steps, decay has 31 steps, level has 15 steps, etc.



Actually, the unit is quite easily programmed. First, you select the bank, group, and kit number you want. Then, you decide which pad you want the sound on. Then, you call up a factory preset sound and modify its parameters to your liking. There is also a Pad Copy function, which cuts down on programming time and can be used to rearrange a kit program. Beyond the 32 kits, there is an extra "test kit" provided so you can check your sounds before actually modifying any of the 32 factory preset kits.

MIDI data can also be programmed in. Variables here are Channel Number, Note Number, Output Mode, and Velocity Curve. All programmed data can be saved on, or loaded from, cassette. Moving the cursor LED into the cassette section on the

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by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

panel allows loading, verifying, or saving data on tape. The digital LED windows display pertinent information as well.

The rear of the *Syncussion-X* contains eight separate 1/4" pad inputs and outputs, left and right 1/4" mix outputs (also mono) with a switch enabling fixed or variable volume control, cassette input and output jacks, MIDI In, Thru, Out, a pad mode selector switch (eight or 16 pads), memory protection switch, plus DIN jacks for the optional remote kit selector box, *Pad Expander* unit, and mute pedal. The hi-hat pad has a jack here that cooperates with the Pad 1 input to enable opening and closing of the hi-hat, as mentioned earlier.

The optional *Pad Expander* unit enables up to 16 pads to be used with the *Syncussion-X* brain. This unit is also rack-mountable and contains only eight sensitivity controls and eight trigger LED indicators. The rear has eight 1/4" inputs and a single DIN output, which connects to the brain. When using the *Pad Expander*, the maximum number of programmable kits cuts in half to 16. So it's merely a question of whether you need 32 kits with eight sounds each or can get along with 16 kits, which have 16 sounds each. Retail price is \$345.00.



The remote kit selector is a small box that can be stand-mounted. It contains eight numbered push buttons, plus the two group/bank select buttons—a duplicate of what is on the control brain's panel. With the remote box, you can easily select your kit numbers while seated at your setup. Retail value is \$105.00.

The 128 preset timbres offered by the *Syncussion-X* span the whole range of percussion sounds. Besides having eight snare drums, eight bass drums, eight acoustic toms, and eight electronic toms, the *Syncussion-X* has timpani, concert bass, congas, bongos, chimes, piano, steel drum, triangle, African drum, tsuzumi, gong, cowbell, xylophone, marimba, and many more, including 24 synthesizer-type sound effects. There are 12 different cymbal sounds, including hi-hats, rides, crashes, China, and splash. The ride and hi-hat sounds are excellent, but the crash sounds are a bit too harsh for my ears; they still have an electronic edge to them. The drum sounds are all quite good, and the tuned percussion sounds are the best. Using the

maximum of 16 pads, you can effectively have a range of one and a half octaves to play *melodic* patterns with. The only thing I can think of that the unit doesn't have is an on-board sampler, but who knows—maybe on the next version.

We're talking *total* percussion here, and I came away pretty impressed with what Pearl has developed this time around. You must hear the *Syncussion-X* in person to fully appreciate what it can do.

The complete *SC-40 Syncussion-X* retails at \$3,409.00. (Stands and pedals are not included, but all connecting cables are.) The brain alone retails at \$2,390.00. The basic setup without cymbal pads retails at \$2,890.00. Other "mini" setups—using the *SC-20* brain, which has only two tone generators—are available as well.



CONNECTIONS

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